

FEBRUARY 17, 1978

IT'S GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY.

ANNCR:

GEORGE WASHINGTON, AMERICA'S FIRST PRESIDENT AND THE MAN WHO FOUGHT FOR HER INDEPENDENCE WAS BORN TWO-HUNDRED-AND-FORTY-SIX YEARS TODAY. HIS IMPOSING AND SPECTACULAR GOOD LOOKS HAVE NOT ONLY ENDURED OVER THE YEARS, THEY EVEN GOT BETTER AND BETTER UNTIL HE BECAME...THE FACE OF HIS COUNTRY. HERE ARE A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT WHY AND HOW HE CAPTURED THE COLLECTIVE AMERICAN IMAGINATION.

VOICE:

GEORGE WASHINGTON LIVED WITHIN HIS CENTURY AND DIED WITH IT, IN THE LAST MONTH OF THE YEAR 1799. HE WAS TRULY AN 18TH CENTURY MAN, A PLANTATION OWNER WHO MARRIED A WEALTHY WIDOW AND ESTABLISHED A SELF-SUFFICIENT HOUSEHOLD WITH SLAVES AND SERVANTS. HE ENJOYED THE PLANTER'S DIVERSIONS: HORSE RACING, FOX HUNTING, GAME SHOOTING. LIKE A TRUE VIRGINIAN OF HIS TIME HE LED A ROBUST AND RATHER VIOLENT LIFE WITH HIGH REGARD FOR COURAGE AND PUNCTUALITY.

BUT TWO MORE THINGS WERE, ABOVE ALL, CLOSE TO HIS HEART AND THEY ARE THE ONES THAT BROUGHT HIM IMMORTALITY: HIS LOVE FOR THE LAND AND HIS RESPECT FOR THE ARMY.

EARLY IN LIFE HE BECAME A LAND SURVEYOR SCOUTING AND MAPPING THE COUNTRY FROM HIS NATIVE VIRGINIA THROUGH THE WILDERNESS WEST ALMOST AS FAR AS LAKE ERIE BORDERING ON WHAT IS NOW THE STATE OF OHIO. HE UNDERSTOOD THE POTENTIAL OF THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT, AND THE PROMISE OF THE WEST. AS FOR THE ARMY, HE WAS 22 WHEN HE SOUGHT AND OBTAINED A COMMISSION IN THE VIRGINIA MILITIA. (OPT) AS A YOUNG OFFICER IN THE BRITISH ARMY, FIGHTING THE FRENCH ON THE BANKS OF THE OHIO RIVER, HE WROTE TO HIS BROTHER: "I HEARD

THE BULLETS WHISTLE AND BELIEVE ME THERE IS SOMETHING CHARMING IN THEIR SOUND." (END OPT) LATER WHEN HE BECAME THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE CONTINENTAL ARMY FIGHTING THE BRITISH IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, HE KNEW THAT THE COLONIES HAD A CAUSE WORTH FIGHTING FOR. AND WHEN THE WAR ENDED AND AMERICA'S INDEPENDENCE WAS CONFIRMED, HE RESIGNED HIS COMMISSION AND RETURNED TO HIS OTHER LOVE: THE LAND. BUT IT WAS NOT TO LAST. CHRONOLOGICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY, GEORGE WASHINGTON BECAME "FIRST IN WAR, FIRST IN PEACE, AND FIRST IN THE HEARTS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN - AS ONE OF HIS FELLOW VIRGINIANS PUT IT. HE WAS AMERICA'S FIRST NATIVE HERO, AND FIRST PRESIDENT. HIS VIRTUES BECAME AMERICA'S VIRTUES. CHILDREN WERE NAMED AFTER HIM, STREETS, PARKS, TOWNS.

BUT INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, THE IMAGE OF WASHINGTON, AS IT DESCENDED TO US, IS NOT THAT OF AN 18TH CENTURY GENTLEMAN-FARMER AND SOLDIER, AS HE WAS IN REALITY, BUT LARGELY A CREATION OF THE 19TH CENTURY ARTISTIC PERCEPTION OF HIM BOTH EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN. THE ARTISTS FLANKED HIM WITH GODDESSES OF FREEDOM AND VICTORY OR CARRIED HIM TO HEAVEN WITH HIS CHEST NOBLY BARED TO THE WAIST AND WRAPPED IN CLASSICAL DRAPERY. IN SHORT, THEY GLORIFIED HIM. BUT THROUGH ALL THIS APOTHEOSIS HIS GREAT PLAIN FACE NOT ONLY ENDURED, BUT GREW WITH AMERICA AS THE PEOPLE INCORPORATED HIM IN THEIR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES. HIS LIKENESS SOLD WASHINGTON STATE APPLES, CIGARS AND STOVE POLISH. IT APPEARED ON TOBACCO AND CEREAL BOXES. IT ADORNED FURNITURE, HANDKERCHIEFS AND CLOCKS. AND TO THIS DAY, IT LOOKS AT US FROM GREEN ONE DOLLAR BILLS AND POSTAGE STAMPS.

THE MAN AND THE MYTH ARE ONE. TOGETHER THEY ARE AMERICA.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, GEORGE WASHINGTON